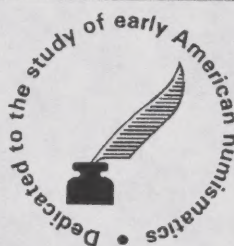


# THE COLONIAL NEWSLETTER

•Since 1960•



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Michael D. Packard  
4905 Village Drive  
Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Mike,

Your Massachusetts cents article in the recent C4 came out very nicely. The plates will be very helpful to me since, I must admit, I never paid much attention to the visual identification of Massachusetts coppers whose varieties always appeared so much alike to me. Your plates are a great service to the hobby, although now I won't have any more excuses! I hope we can expect a sequel on 1788 varieties and the half cents.

Eric Newman and I were discussing your article and he asked me a question I cannot answer. On visual examination from pictures, the differences between the counterfeit and genuine coins is very subtle; the question arose: have any photographic studies ever been done to compare all the legends and devices to ascertain just how much, and in which ways, these four counterfeits actually vary from the genuine coins? On the behalf of both of us, I told him I would run it by you since I'm sure you will know if anybody does.

This is asked because, as Confederation counterfeits go, these Massachusetts counterfeits are expertly copied and do not approach the primitive imitations, or distinctly different pieces, one sees with all the contemporaneously struck Confederation counterfeits from other clandestine mints. There is no problem at all in distinguishing them (Miller 4-L, 6.1-M, Maris 54-k, etc.) from the real thing. These false Massachusetts dies look very professional and, except as discussed below, they don't seem to vary in style from the genuine pieces any more than the genuine coins vary among themselves.

In the case of all Massachusetts cents, both genuine and counterfeit, the Indian's tunic, bow and arrow were pretty much finished by hand, producing diagnostic positioning of certain features and some minor stylistic nonconformity which you have summarized as diagnostic characteristics. I reviewed what little photographic material I have available and concluded that the spindly letters on 1787 1-B (Norweb #2648) (which I think is a clearer copy of your print) are obviously different from all the others. Although, I'm working from pictures and visual evidence is risky at best, most of the letters of 5-I (Taylor #2130)



and 7-H do not resemble 1-B, and are more like the genuine. Is this a correct observation? In both genuine and counterfeits, all the eagles look very much alike, except I think the wings of 1-B are a bit thicker at the base than all the others. (Do we know if the Massachusetts mint used any common device puncheons?) It appears to me that the eagles on 5-I and 7-H approximate those on the legitimate issues ones and are not as thick as 1-B, but then again, merely looking at pictures can be misleading. I think the 8's in the dates of all the three counterfeits pictured in your article are different from the genuine coppers.

So the question is: except for the evident letter punch differences on 1-B, has anyone ever done any photo overlay to examine the letters and numbers in the legends and the central devices which can separate the real from the false dies? In what ways do the four counterfeits differ from Callander and Perkins which would set them apart from the legitimate issues rather than just being some variation from the norm? This is an important point since one should never rely on visual impressions which are notoriously inaccurate. (In fact, some of my observations may be 100% wrong.) Remember how the traditionally accepted Morristown horseshoe shaped "U" did not withstand the photo overlay test (page 176 -Mossman) when someone thought to test the theory with a camera. Also, are all the counterfeits punched from the same letter and number set suggesting a common origin? (As to the latter, my visual impression is no, since 1-B appears to be the odd man from the other two of which I have photos.) Weight is another factor. The 1-B's which are host coins for 16.3-N are all very light - the three I traced averaged 116.8 - but the Norweb #2648 is heavier. The Taylor #2130 5-H is well overweight at 170.7!! Do you have the weights of the other counterfeits recorded?

These are all questions I never really considered before since these counterfeits, as a group, are very rare and would not have made any appreciable contemporaneous impact on the circulation of Massachusetts copper. Now if you find more similarities than differences between the counterfeits and the genuine issues, the next question is, could any of the presumed counterfeit issues have been just some unexplained miscarriage from the authorized mint? According to your pictures, these look to have been struck on well made, although lightweight, planchets indicative of a quality operation. If the average numismatist needs your fine plates to distinguish between the good and the bad, I suspect that in the Bay State in 1787 and 1788, 99.9% of the citizens would never have questioned them and so why didn't these false ones continue to circulate along with good ones? It seems strange to me that the 1-B's were used for Connecticut planchet stock since the Massachusetts coppers were better received and never depreciated in 1789 when all other failed. There is some unexplained mystery in the economics here. Obviously they are all as scarce as hen's teeth, except for the 1787 1-B which is more common as a host coin. The die failure of 5-H can account for its rarity. So a second question arises: this may be heresy but will 1787 1-B prove to be the only odd ball in the lot and the others just a normal variation? Here is where photo overlay will be extremely helpful. More questions than answers, I'm afraid - but this is business as usual in pre-Federal numismatics!!



These are things I never considered before until my conversation with Eric. I really don't want this letter to go to the C4 editor because all this work could have already been done in a series I've not followed closely. It could have been recorded in *Penny-wise* or some other journal and I didn't want to embarrass myself for having overlooked the obvious. Since I neither own any of these nor do I have access to any for examination, I'm sure that you would have the answers. A photo examination of letters and numbers (attention Tony Carlotto) may be a great project, unless, of course, it has already been studied. So basically, this letter is not only a question but also a suggestion for future research for an in-depth comparison between the legitimate and bogus Massachusetts issues, if not already done. Your help with this inquiry, would be greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

Sincerely yours,

Philip L. Mossman, M.D.

P.S. Did I ever send you may Massachusetts cents for your data base? If not, I'd be glad to.

Dear Eric,

I hope this summarizes our discussion. I've spent several days reviewing all my Mass cent data and it appears that only 1787 1-B is the "odd man". You may well be correct that the others are just some normal mint variant. Well - The question has been asked.

Mary and I had a great time last weekend. We were so pleased to have met your lovely wife and daughter. I hope I didn't bore the audience.

Best regards  
Phil

cc: Eric P. Newman